

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

14 December 2021

Subject: DfE Children's Social Care Covid-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund

Cabinet member: Cllr Laura Mayes Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

During the summer of 2021, the Department for Education (DfE) initiated a bidding round for grant funding under a Regional Recovery Fund. The fund was designed to bring together three existing programmes to enable local authorities to work together on a regional basis to identify priorities where a regional approach would be beneficial. This re-alignment of programmes was done to provide greater flexibility in the regional priorities being set.

The grant funding was split into 3 sections:

- Core regional funding (strand 1)
- Practice Solutions focusing on specific challenges where expertise in a particular field is required (strand 2)
- Innovation Programme funding (strand 3)

The South West Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) worked together to submit a bid across all three strands of the funding available. In total, £1,536,200 was bid for in August 2021 and the DfE advised that the full amount of funding had been awarded on 1 October 2021.

Wiltshire Council, as the designated lead local authority for the RIIA, received the full amount of funding to then distribute to the south west local authorities as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding.

The DfE advised that they would not be publicising grant awards until after the parliamentary recess that ended on 18 October, therefore, it was agreed that this report would provide Cabinet with a retrospective update on the funding award in November.

Proposal(s)

Cabinet is asked to:

- a) Note the successful outcome of the Regional Recovery Funding bid across the South West
- b) Approve the acceptance of the receipt of funding of £1,536,200

Reason for Proposal

In line with the Council's constitution, to allow the acceptance of the funding associated with DfE Regional Recovery Fund.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

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Purpose of Report

1. To advise Members of the successful outcome of the South West Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA) bid to the DfE through the Children's Social Care Covid-19 Regional Recovery and Building Back Better Fund.
2. To ensure that Wiltshire Council as designated lead local authority has approval to receive and distribute the funding in line with the council's constitution.

Background

3. The DfE advised in early summer 2021 that it was amalgamating three existing programmes of funding into the Regional Recovery Fund.
4. Those three programmes were the:
 - a. Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA)
 - b. Partners in Practice (Understanding Excellence)
 - c. Innovation Programme
5. The intentions set out by the DfE were that the realignment would strengthen existing structures and collaboration between regions and the DfE and allow RIIA's to make regional plans that would drive forward their collective recovery goals.
6. The funding bids were structured into three strands
 - a. Strand 1 - Core funding which ensures that all local authorities in the region benefit
 - b. Strand 2 - Practice Solutions Funding which focused on six specific practice areas. Any local authority rated good or outstanding overall and

across all sub-judgements were able to lead on these areas supporting other local authorities if the relevant eligibility criteria were met

- c. Strand 3 – Innovation Programme funding which enabled local authorities to ‘pump prime’ funding to scale and spread the best innovation projects within a region
7. Bid submission included a regional recovery plan that identified the regional priorities which each local authority in the region signed up to as part of the RIIA Memorandum of Understanding.
 8. Timescales for bidding were short and all bids were due in on 13 August 2021.
 9. All funding is expected to be used by the 31 March 2022.
 10. The South West RIIA worked to submit bids across as many areas of the funding as possible and it’s submission bid for £1.5m of funding for the region.
 11. The outcome of bids were notified at the beginning of October and is set out in the table below:

LA	Strand	Funding Agreed	Successful?
Regional	1 – Core Funding	£315,000	Yes
Dorset	1 – Optional Funding (Workforce)	£70,200	Yes
South Gloucestershire	1 – Optional Funding (Placement Sufficiency)	£24,900	Yes
Swindon	1 – Optional Funding (Workforce)	£15,000	Yes
Bristol	1 – Optional Funding (Best Practice)	£190,000	Yes
Bristol	1 – Optional Funding (Workforce)	£10,000	Yes
Wiltshire (with Swindon and Dorset)	2 – Project 2 Safeguarding Extra Familial Harm	£250,000	Yes
Wiltshire (with BANES)	2 – Project 4 Safeguarding Infants	£80,000	Yes
Wiltshire (with Swindon, Dorset and Bristol)	2 – Project 6c (Digital Recovery)	£48,000	Yes
North Somerset (with Dorset, Devon and South Gloucestershire)	3 – Mockingbird	£329,000	Yes
Devon, South Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset	3 – PAUSE	£204,100	Yes
Total funding agreed		£1,536,200	

12. The South West was successful at receiving the full amount bid for in this bidding round.
13. The DfE indicated when the outcome notifications were sent that wider publicity of the awards would not be made under after the parliamentary recess ended on 18 October and therefore it was not possible to bring this item as a public item to October Cabinet.
14. The DfE has indicated that regional funding could be delivered in this way in future years.

Main Considerations for the Council

15. The bids submitted by the South West are aimed at accelerating learning across the region in a number of key areas that can be completed within the spending timescales.
16. Wiltshire Council as the designated lead authority will receive the full amount of funding awarded and will then distribute to other local authorities or to the partner agencies involved.
17. Wiltshire Council will be required to hold the central core funding for the region to be used for self-assessment and peer challenge activities prior to the 31 March 2022.
18. As the total amount of funding to be received by the council exceeds the relevant thresholds in accordance with the constitution Cabinet needs to formally resolve the acceptance of the grant funding and its subsequent expenditure.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

19. Due to the nature of the decision and the publicity restrictions report engagement with scrutiny has been informal.

Safeguarding Considerations

20. The DfE Recovery Fund is intended to support the work of children's social care so all bids and projects should lead to improved safeguarding practice across the south west and Wiltshire.

Public Health Implications

21. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Procurement Implications

22. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

23. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

24. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

25. The Council would not be in line with its constitution by formally resolving to offer and receive the associated funding and commitment to future spend to improve regional recovery.
26. The South West would lose £1.5m of DfE funding that will be used to improve and spread best practice across the region.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

27. Although viewed as minimal there is a risk that the funding will not be spent by the deadline set by the DfE. This is mitigated by paragraph 30, below.

Financial Implications

28. The financial implications are implicit in the information set out in this report and the risks identified above. As the lead designated local authority, Wiltshire Council has the responsibility of accepting and distributing the regional funding as set out in the grant award table.
29. Whilst the DfE has stated that the funding should be spent by 31st March 2022 they acknowledge the timeframe pressures and as such are paying the monies up front and will not be requiring grant returns or detailed proof of spend, the spend information will be captured in informal catch ups between policy leads and the lead local authority. If there is an underspend, funds can be moved to other regional priorities.
30. As such and in order to maximise the funding, it is possible that funds can be badged against existing recovery activity in this financial year and a reserve set up to extend activity into 2022-23 if required. This will be examined as part of the year end procedures.

Legal Implications

31. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Workforce Implications

32. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Options Considered

33. The Council could choose to not to accept the funding but this option has been discounted.

Conclusions

34. This report demonstrates Wiltshire's commitment to its responsibility as the designated lead local authority for the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance driving improvement in outcomes and shared learning across the South West.

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Appendix 1 – DfE RF Single Response South West Region